
The Coach–Coachee Relationship in Executive Coaching: A Field Study

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Numerous authors have suggested that the working relationship between coach and coachee constitutes an essential condition to the success of executive coaching. This study empirically investigated the links between the coach–coachee relationship and the success of a coaching intervention in an organizational setting. Data were collected from two samples: 73 managers who received executive coaching for a period of eight months and 24 coaches. Results from 31 coach–coachee dyads were analyzed. Results indicate that the coach–coachee relationship plays a mediating role between the coaching received and development of the coachees' self-efficacy. Findings also show four significant correlates to the coach–coachee relationship: the coach's self-efficacy with regard to facilitating learning and results, the coachee's motivation to transfer, his or her perception of supervisor support, and the number of coaching sessions received.

In organizational settings, executive coaching has become an increasingly common skill-development method (Bacon & Spear, 2003; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). The International Coaching Federation (ICF) alone numbered 15,000 members in 90 countries in 2008. However, many authors have noted the lack of scientific studies on the process and the outcome of executive coaching (see Lowman, 2005; Sue-Chan & Latham, 2004), and others have argued that this development approach is overused considering the paucity of research on the subject (McGovern et al., 2001). In short, the results from empirical studies indicate that executive coaching is positively associated with self-efficacy (Baron & Morin, 2007; Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2006), leadership (Thach, 2002) and performance

(Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003). In regard to the process, very little is known about the variables that influence its effectiveness.

The working relationship established between the coach and the coachee appears to be a key process variable. Numerous authors have suggested that a good working relationship constitutes an essential condition for the success of executive coaching (Kampa & White, 2002; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 2001; Lowman, 2005). However, there are scarcely any reported studies of the link between the coach–coachee relationship and the effectiveness of executive coaching. Further, to our knowledge there are no studies that have examined the determinants of the coach–coachee working relationship. The goal of our study was to partially fill that gap in the literature. Our first objective aimed to answer the question, What role does the working relationship between the coach and the coachee have in executive coaching outcomes? In this study, exploration of the coach–coachee working relationship has been largely inspired by the literature on the working alliance from the psychotherapy domain. Specifically, we attempted to empirically explore the links between the coach–coachee relationship and self-efficacy, a variable significantly associated with training outcomes (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001) and job performance (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1997). Our second objective was to study correlates to the coach–coachee working relationship. Variables were chosen on the basis of the psychotherapy literature. In short, results have indicated that the therapist's skills (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003), the client's motivation and involvement (Schneider & Klauer, 2001), and the number of sessions received (de Roten et al., 2004) are significantly associated with working alliance. Further, because executive coaching takes place in an organizational setting and often involves a triadic relationship among coach, coachee, and supervisor (Kilburg, 2002), supervisory support was also included in our model. Specifically, six correlates were investigated in this study: for the coach, three distinct self-efficacy beliefs related to coaching skills (relational, communication, and facilitating learning and results) and, for the coachee, the motivation to transfer, the perception of supervisor support, and the amount of coaching received. This study represents an effort to build a bridge between two scientific literatures: the abundant literature dealing with the therapeutic process and the growing literature on executive coaching.

Executive Coaching

A number of definitions have been proposed for executive coaching, mainly in the popular press. For our study, we chose that of Douglas and Morley (2000), for which coaching is

the process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective (Peterson, 1996).

Executive coaching involves the teaching of skills in the context of a personal relationship with the learner, and providing feedback on the executive's interpersonal relations and skills (Sperry, 1993). An ongoing series of activities tailored to the individual's current issues or relevant problem is designed by the coach to assist the executive in maintaining a consistent, confident focus as he or she tunes strengths and manages shortcomings (Tobias, 1996).

The adjective *executive* can be explained by the original use of coaching with CEOs and vice presidents. Although the use of executive coaching has been extended to lower levels of management over the past decade, the expression "executive coaching" was kept because the objectives of the coaching interventions did not change.

Executive coaching is frequently confused with other workplace interventions, particularly supervisory coaching and mentoring. Supervisory coaching refers to the use of coaching behaviors by managers as a method of supervising subordinates (Ellinger, Ellinger, & Keller, 2003), whereas mentoring has been traditionally defined as "a relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger, less experienced protégé for the purpose of helping and developing the protégé's career" (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p. 5). In some situations, the boundary with executive coaching can be blurred, as it can be with other developmental interventions (D'Abate, Eddy, & Tannenbaum, 2003). In terms of time, mentoring is usually open-ended, and the mentor generally works in the same domain as the protégé (Gray, 2006). Further, Ragins and Kram (2007) suggest that mentors may offer two functions, career and psychosocial. Career functions involve a range of behaviors, including coaching protégés, sponsoring their advancement, increasing their exposure, and offering them protection, as a way to help them prepare for hierarchical advancement within their organizations. Psychosocial functions include behaviors, such as offering acceptance and providing friendship, that enhance the protégé's professional and personal growth, identity and self-worth. In short, whereas executive coaching aims to increase employee's work performance, mentoring addresses a larger set of issues related to the protégé's life inside and outside the organization (Sketch, 2001). It may share functions with executive coaching, but objectives and context differ.

From another perspective, many authors have also noted the many similarities between executive coaching and psychotherapy, as much in the structure of the process as in the human contact characterizing it. Indeed, these two forms of personalized relationships both attempt to help individuals understand how their cognitive and emotional reactions interfere with their self-efficacy (Hodgetts, 2002). Nevertheless, a number of elements differentiate these two developmental processes: (1) by aiming to develop professional skills, executive coaching is much more specific to the work setting than is the psychotherapy process (Peltier, 2001); (2) coaching focuses on the present and future, whereas therapy tends to put more emphasis on the past (Gray, 2006); (3) coaching is more directive and more oriented toward action than many

forms of therapy (Levinson, 1996); (4) in executive coaching, the organization is almost always the paying client, which automatically creates a connection of responsibility between the coach and the organization (Kilburg, 2002), and this particularity can lead coachees to less self-revelation than in psychotherapy (Barner & Higgins, 2007); and finally, (5) therapy goes much deeper into the personal issues being addressed and into the fundamental causes of resistance to change, such as behavior patterns and dysfunctional personality traits (Kilburg, 2000; Peltier, 2001). Working at this therapeutic level requires clinical expertise that few coaches possess and that seems inappropriate within the framework of the executive coaching process (Ting & Hart, 2004).

The empirical studies published on executive coaching have mainly been concerned with its ability to generate positive effects. In short, the results of the reported studies indicate that executive coaching in an organizational setting is positively and significantly linked to individual performance (McGovern et al., 2001; Olivero, Bane, & Kopelman, 1997; Smither et al., 2003), self-efficacy (Baron & Morin, 2007; Evers et al., 2006), organizational commitment and performance (Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Olivero et al., 1997), leadership (Thach, 2002), and conflict resolution (McGovern et al., 2001). These studies also report interesting relationships with intangible variables such as the learner's self-awareness and satisfaction with supervisors and colleagues (Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Styhre, 2008), work satisfaction (Luthans & Peterson, 2003; McGovern et al., 2001), balance between personal and professional lives, as well as time management (Gegner, 1997). Nevertheless, very few of these studies have examined the process of executive coaching.

Two reviews of the scientific literature on executive coaching have identified the coach-coachee working relationship as one of the key variables of the coaching process (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Smither & Reilly, 2001). Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) also noted that establishing a relationship of trust constitutes the first step in the executive coaching process. It is during this phase that the coachee determines the professional and relational credibility of the coach, which influences the probability of the coach's suggestions having an influence on the coachee. In line, Ting and Hart (2004) propose three key elements for a good relationship: the connection between the coach and the coachee, their collaboration, and their mutual commitment to the process. These authors also specify that, although it is fundamental to the process, establishing a relationship should not constitute an end unto itself but rather be regarded as the basis for the process. In this way, establishing a productive relationship promotes the success of the subsequent steps in the process. Among these, feedback on the evaluation results (for example, potential, performance, multisource feedback, self-assessment) that aim to establish the development plan for the client is particularly important. Such feedback aims to elicit the coachee's ownership of and engagement in the process and helps address the individual resistance and defenses provoked by the evaluation (Kampa & White, 2002). Thereafter, the heart of the coaching process is

implementation. During this period, the coachee attempts to apply the new behaviors or targeted attitudes and regularly meets with the coach to discuss the obstacles and successes encountered along the way. It is also during this phase that the client develops a sense of control over his or her behavior with respect to professional issues (Smither & Reilly, 2001).

Empirical Studies on the Coach–Coachee Working Relationship. Although there has been extensive research on therapist–client relationships, only three studies have examined the relationship that develops between the coach and the coachee during executive coaching. First, a retrospective study by McGovern et al. (2001) reported that 84% of coachees identified the quality of the relationship with their coach as critical to the success of coaching. However, because of the post facto design and the descriptive nature of the study, no statistical correlation could be established between the relationship and the success of executive coaching. Second, a study by Dingman (2004) polled, by Internet, 92 coachees who had completed a coaching process. The results showed a positive and significant correlation between the quality of the coaching relationship and the coachee's self-efficacy. In that study, the quality of the coaching relationship was conceptualized in three dimensions: the coach's interpersonal skills; the coach's communication skills; and the instrumental support offered by the coach, which refers to the ability to stimulate the client to think and feel in new ways. In our view, Dingman's conceptualization refers more to coaching skills than to an evaluation of *the relationship* established between the coach and the coachee. Finally, a study conducted by Berry (2005) compared face-to-face coaching with distance coaching by examining two variables: the coach–coachee relationship and a coaching outcome measure of problem resolution (degree of change). A sample of 102 professional coaches responded to an online survey. The results showed a positive and significant correlation between the relationship and change, as evaluated by the coaches and only for the distance coaching condition. In that study, the coachees were not surveyed.

Considering the lack of empirical research on the coach–coachee working relationship, we decided in this study to rely on the concept of working alliance to investigate the coach–coachee relationship. This concept, which refers to the working relationship that develops between therapist and client, has been extensively studied for a half-century (Horvath, 2005). Both Latham and Heslin (2003) and Joo (2005) have argued for adapting the working alliance to the process of executive coaching.

Working Alliance

There is an abundance of scientific literature concerning the relationship between the therapist and the client in psychotherapy. Several names and conceptualizations of this relationship have been proposed (Horvath & Luborsky, 1993). In this study, we relied on the conceptualization proposed by Bordin (1979). Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Bordin broadened the

concept of working alliance to include all change-inducing relationships (Horvath & Greenberg, 1989). Furthermore, the emphasis placed on collaboration between the therapist and the client distinguishes the working alliance model from other models of the therapeutic relationship, highlighting the interdependence of the therapist and the client in development of the alliance. According to Bordin (1979), the strength of the working relationship depends on the existing agreement between the client and the therapist concerning (1) the bond that develops between them, (2) the goals of therapy, and (3) the tasks required to reach those goals. In this model, the working alliance is considered a prerequisite that makes it possible for the client to accept the offered treatment.

From an empirical point of view, the quality of the working alliance appears to be the most robust predictive factor for the success of therapy. The results of two meta-analyses show a significant effect between working alliance and positive therapy outcome (Horvath & Symonds, 1991; Martin, Gaske, & Davis, 2000). In addition, as suggested by Castonguay, Constantino, and Holtforth (2006), the concept of the working alliance holds such an important place in what is thought of as "good therapy" that it appears unimaginable not to include this variable in a study examining the process or outcome of psychotherapy. We believe it should be the same for studies examining the process and the outcomes of executive coaching. In support, authors in the organizational domain have argued for adapting the working alliance to the process of executive coaching (Latham & Heslin, 2003; Joo, 2005). As is the case for counseling, the effectiveness of executive coaching is likely dependant on mutual agreement on the goals that are to be attained, the paths to attaining them, and an executive's level of interpersonal comfort with the coach.

In the psychotherapy literature, some studies have investigated the mediating role of the working alliance on the relation between a client's characteristics and the outcome of the therapy (Hardy et al., 2001; Meyer et al., 2002); others have examined the moderating role of the working alliance on the relation between cognitive therapy for depression and various change indicators (see Whisman, 1993). However, results thus far have not been conclusive. Castonguay et al. (2006) have suggested that more studies are needed to clarify the issue of the direction and nature of the alliance's impact on the process and outcome of treatment. To our knowledge, no empirical study has examined the role of the working alliance in the relation between coaching and the outcomes of coaching. This constitutes our first objective. Even so, because there was no clear support in the literature for either the moderating or the mediating role of the working alliance in the relationship between coaching and its effectiveness, we did not formulate any hypotheses.

In this study, coachees' self-efficacy belief is used as the outcome measure. Self-efficacy has been extensively studied in the training literature (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). Results from numerous empirical studies indicate that self-efficacy plays a mediating role between training and

posttraining variables, such as performance (Gaudine & Saks, 2004; Mathieu, Martineau, & Tennenbaum, 1993; Morin & Latham, 2000), satisfaction toward training (Mathieu et al., 1993), and the ability of newcomers to face obstacles (Saks, 1995). Furthermore, some authors insist on the relevance of studying the impact of executive coaching on coachee self-efficacy. For instance, Smither and Reilly (2001) advance that the coach's efforts to enhance the coachee's self-efficacy beliefs are critical for implementation of behavioral changes. They suggest studying what tactics effective coaches use to increase employee self-efficacy. In line with this, Malone (2001) suggests that executive coaching allows enhancement of self-efficacy because it naturally uses techniques aiming its determinants—that is, self-thought, mastery experiences, modeling, social persuasion and psychological state management (see Bandura, 1997; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

The second goal of this study was to examine correlates of the working alliance in executive coaching. Specifically, we examined the six correlates described in the next sections.

Working Alliance Determinants Related to the Coach. Joo (2005) suggested that the outcome of executive coaching was linked in part to the coach's style. The psychotherapy literature indicates that some therapists are more helpful than others, and that these differences seem to be more related to the therapist's skills than to the treatment methods. Along the same lines, a recent review of the literature indicated that many attributes (flexibility, warmth, interest, openness, and others) and techniques used by the therapist (such as behaviors that promote a sense of connection with the client and favor in-depth reflection and exploration) are associated with the development and maintenance of the alliance (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003). For its part, the ICF, the largest training and certification association for coaching, recognizes four basic coaching skills: (1) meeting ethical standards; (2) the capacity to create a trusting relationship; (3) the capacity for effective communication (active listening, questioning, direct communication); and (4) the capacity to facilitate learning and goal-reaching, or in other words the ability to increase self-awareness, design action plans and translate them into behaviors, establish goals and monitor the client's progress, and make the client responsible for his or her actions.

In light of this literature, we have decided in this study to focus on three specific coaching skills: relational skills (for example, empathy, respect, trust, presence, and availability), communication skills (questioning, reformulating, reinforcing, confronting), and the ability to facilitate learning and results (as in establishing a development plan, assessing learning, and identifying obstacles). In consequence, three hypotheses were formulated:

HYPOTHESIS 1A: *The coach's relational skills are positively associated with working alliance.*

HYPOTHESIS 1B: *The coach's communication skills are positively associated with working alliance.*

HYPOTHESIS 1C: *The coach's facilitating learning and results skills are positively associated with working alliance.*

Working Alliance Determinants Related to the Coachee. In both psychotherapy and management training, the results of numerous studies indicate that the participant's motivation in any developmental process is related to its outcome (Axtell, Maitlis, & Yearta, 1997; Kirwan & Birchall, 2006; Schneider & Klauer, 2001). However, to our knowledge no research has made an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the coachee's motivation and the working alliance. Specifically on the basis of the training literature in organizational settings (see Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000), we postulate that the participant's motivation to transfer newly acquired skills reinforces commitment to invest effort in the coaching process, and that this commitment constitutes a prerequisite for establishing a working alliance with the coach. The motivation to transfer refers to the orientation, intensity, and persistence of the efforts an individual intends to apply in order to put new knowledge and skills to use in the work context.

The scientific training literature also suggests that a manager who does not feel supported by his or her supervisor in the coaching process is likely to be less invested in that process. In short, the results from empirical studies (see Colquitt et al., 2000) show that participants who reported a high level of support in their working environment (organization, immediate superior, colleagues) were more likely to apply their new skills than participants who reported a low level of support. In psychotherapy, it has been reported that the level of social support reported by clients is positively associated with the quality of the working alliance (Mallinckrodt, 1992).

Finally, in the psychotherapy literature development of the working alliance over a series of sessions has been examined in a number of studies (de Roten et al., 2004; Kivlighan & Shaughnessy, 1995, 2000). These studies have shown that, in general, the working alliance tends to adopt two patterns: either a progressive increase in quality over the series of sessions or development in a quadratic pattern characterized by the three phases of initial optimism, then frustration and negative reactions during the period of working on the issues of therapy, and finally a positive reaction based on more realistic perceptions than those present in the initial phase. We believe that the quadratic pattern is less suited to the reality of executive coaching, because the phase of frustration and negative reactions is less probable thanks to the nature of the work conducted during the sessions and the characteristics of the clientele.

In consequence, three more hypotheses were formulated:

HYPOTHESIS 2: *The coachee's motivation to transfer is positively associated with working alliance.*

HYPOTHESIS 3: *The coachee's perception of supervisor support is positively associated with working alliance.*

HYPOTHESIS 4: *The number of coaching sessions received by the coachee is positively associated with working alliance.*

Method

Field Setting. This study was conducted in a large North American manufacturing company that offered its junior and midlevel managers a leadership development program lasting eight months and addressing various topics such as leadership, interpersonal communication, power and delegation, employee development, and mobilization. In this study, we chose to focus on the ability of managers to promote development of their subordinates. Three training methods were used for the managers' professional development:

Classroom seminar (eight sessions of one day each). Participants gathered in groups of 11 to 15 persons outside the workplace each month. Sessions were conducted by a training consultant.

Action learning groups (seven sessions of a half-day each). Participants gathered in groups of five to eight each month to reflect on their skills and practice. The role of each participant was to support and challenge colleagues in their self-examination process.

Executive coaching (up to 14 sessions of 90 minutes each). Executive coaching consisted of face-to-face interactions between a "certified" executive and a manager participating in the leadership development program. During the first meeting, managers were asked to establish three main goals they wanted to work on. These goals had to be related to the skills addressed during the leadership development program. Following a structured process, the coach's main responsibility was to guide and support coachees in attainment of their established goals. Although the development program suggested one coaching session every two weeks, the specific scheduling was left to the discretion of the coach and the coachee.

Participants. The participants in this study were divided into two groups: coachees and coaches. The coachees were the managers who had voluntarily signed up for the management skills development program ($n = 127$). Of these, 118 managers completed the first questionnaire during the first classroom seminar. Among these, 101 responded to the second questionnaire, administered five months later; 80 responded to the third questionnaire, administered after an additional three months. Nonrespondents were mostly absent participants when questionnaires were distributed, and in a few cases managers who simply refused to answer. Of this group of 80 participants who answered all questionnaires, seven respondents were excluded from the analysis because they had participated only partially in the program (one or two lectures, or no coaching). Our final sample was thus composed of 73 coachees (63 men, 10 women) for a response rate of 57.5%. The average age of the

coachee participants was 38 years, 63% had a university-level education, and the average number of years as a manager was 4.7.

The coaches were 64 executives participating in a coaching certification program. Prior to the start of the management skills development program, these senior managers had received two days of training on coaching, given by an outside consultant. They then completed their certification by participating in four two-hour individual meetings with a “master coach” and four four-hour action learning workshops. Among the coach participants, 24 (21 men, 3 women) returned the questionnaire that was sent to them at the end of the program, for a response rate of 37.5%. Thirty-one coach–coachee dyads were formed, because some coaches were being paired with two coachees for the duration of the program. The pairings were done so that no coach had hierarchical authority over the managers he or she coached. The average age of the coaches was 41 years, 79% had a university-level education, and the average number of years as a manager was 9.3.

Research Design and Data Collection Procedures. The design used in this study resembles a one-group pretest-posttest design, except that the coachees received the treatment (executive coaching) at variable intensities (see Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Wexley & Latham, 2002). However, even though the number of sessions of coaching varied significantly among coaches, this design did not allow verification of causality.

The data collection procedure was as follows: before the program, we collected a first measure of the coachee’s self-efficacy and some sociodemographic characteristics for both coaches and coachees; during the program, around month five, we measured both motivation to transfer and supervisory support; and finally, after the program, we collected a second measure of the coachee’s self-efficacy as well as measures of working alliance and coach’s self-efficacy.

Measures. Coachee self-efficacy. The dependent variable was measured by an eight-item 11-point Likert-type scale specifically developed for this study where, as recommended by Bandura (2001), 0 indicated “not at all confident” and 10 indicated “completely confident.” The wording of items (for example, “Today, as a manager, I feel confident in my ability to help my employees learn lessons from the difficulties and setbacks they may encounter”) was developed in line with the content of the training program related to development of subordinates. All items were examined by two subject matter experts (SMEs), an academic specializing in management skills and the senior practitioner who designed the training program. The alpha coefficients were .89 (pretraining) and .88 (posttraining).

Coach–coachee working relationship. This variable was measured using the 12-item 7-point Likert scale Working Alliance Inventory, short form or WAI-S (Corbière, Bisson, Lauzon, & Ricard, 2006; Tracey & Kokotovic, 1989). This inventory measures three components of the working alliance: (1) goals (for instance, “We are working toward goals that we have agreed on”); (2) tasks

(“My coach and I agreed on the steps to follow to improve my situation”); and (3) bonding (“My coach and I have developed mutual trust”). WAI-S is widely used in psychotherapy research (Martin et al., 2000). Validation studies (Corbière et al., 2006; Tracey & Kokotovic, 1989) have shown that the WAI-S presents good construct validity and high reliability. The wording of the original version was slightly adapted to fit the coaching context (“coach” instead of “therapist” and “development needs” instead of “problems”). Two items formulated in the negative were withdrawn because their inclusion caused the internal consistency of the overall score to fall considerably, from $\alpha = .93$ to $\alpha = .77$.

Executive coaching. This variable was measured by the number of coaching sessions received by each coachee. Data were provided by the HR department.

Coach’s self-efficacy in regard to coaching skills. The coach’s self-efficacy was measured by an 18-item 11-point Likert scale specifically developed for this study. The appendix presents all items. They were developed in collaboration with the senior practitioner, who ran the coach certification program and drew heavily on the basic coaching skills suggested by the ICF. The limited number of coaches ($n = 24$) did not permit factorial analysis to be completed; instead, internal coherence analysis was conducted according to conceptual groupings. The alpha values were relational skills ($\alpha = .75$), communication skills ($\alpha = .60$), and ability to facilitate learning and results ($\alpha = .76$).

Motivation to transfer. This variable was measured by a four-item 5-point Likert scale (for example, “I am enthusiastic about the idea of trying to use my new knowledge in my professional activities”) taken from the Learning Transfer System Inventory (LTSI). Results from a study conducted by Holton, Bates, and Ruona (2000) indicate high validity scores. The alpha coefficient was .82.

Supervisor support. This variable was measured by six items also taken from the LTSI developed by Holton and colleagues (2000) (among them “My superior shows an interest in what I am learning during training” and “My superior congratulates me for my work when I use what I learned during training”). The alpha coefficient was .82.

Results

Preliminary Analyses. Before proceeding with the testing of our hypotheses, we first tested for significant differences between the managers who completed all the questionnaires and the other managers enrolled in the development program. The results showed no significant differences with regard to these sociodemographic characteristics: age ($t_{116} = -.48$, n.s.), sex ($\chi^2 [1] = .39$, n.s.), education ($\chi^2 [3] = 1.65$, n.s.), and number of years as a manager ($t_{115} = -.78$, n.s.). The pretraining self-efficacy of the coachees (Coachee SE, Before) did not differ significantly between the two groups ($t_{114} = -1.01$, n.s.).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Variables Under Study

<i>Variables</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Coachee SE						
Before	.89	73	7.10	1.22	4.63	9.75
After	.88	73	7.90	0.87	5.88	9.88
Working alliance	.93	73	5.79	0.78	3.30	7.00
Training methods						
Class seminars	—	73	7.78	0.42	7	8
Action learning groups	—	73	6.10	0.86	3	7
Executive coaching sessions	—	73	5.34	2.05	1	11
Coach SE						
Relational	.75	24	8.68	0.67	7.50	10.00
Communication	.60	24	7.86	0.65	6.50	9.25
Facilitating learning and results	.76	24	7.94	0.59	7.13	9.00
Motivation to transfer	.82	70	4.01	0.56	2.25	5.00
Supervisor support	.82	69	3.03	0.72	1.33	5.00

Finally, no significant differences were observed with regard to the gender of the coach ($t_{68} = -.66$, n.s.) or the single- or mixed-gender status of the coaching dyads ($t_{68} = -.07$, n.s.).

Descriptive Analyses. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables. The most interesting result is that the extent of coaching received by the coachees was highly variable. Some received one or two sessions whereas others were involved in up to eleven sessions. Qualitative data indicates that lack of time and schedule conflicts were the two key reasons reported by the coachees for not attending one or several coaching sessions.

The results from a paired *t*-test analysis indicate that there was a significant increase in coachee self-efficacy ($t_{72} = 6.27$, $p < .01$) between the beginning and the end of the training program. Also, the results from the partial correlation matrix—after controlling for the coachee's pretraining self-efficacy—indicate that the number of sessions of action learning was not significantly linked with the coachee's posttraining self-efficacy ($r_p = .10$, n.s.), whereas executive coaching had a significant correlation with it ($r_p = 0.24$, $p < .05$). Further, executive coaching was significantly related to working alliance ($r_p = 0.32$, $p < .01$) and working alliance was significantly related to posttraining self-efficacy ($r_p = 0.48$, $p < .01$). Thus the conditions required for mediation analysis as proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) were respected.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix of the Correlates of the Working Alliance

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Coach SE-Relation	–						
2. Coach SE-Communication	.65**	–					
3. Coach SE-Facilitating	.52**	.50**	–				
4. Motivation to transfer	–.11	–.07	.13	–			
5. Supervisor support	.06	–.05	.14	.27*	–		
6. Coaching received	–.16	–.14	.08	–.07	.24*	–	
7. Working alliance	.07	.00	.42**	.36**	.29*	.32**	–

Note: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

The correlation matrix of the correlates of the working alliance presented in Table 2 reveals that the coachee's self-efficacy with respect to relational and communication skills had no significant link with working alliance. Hypotheses 1a and 1b were thus rejected. In contrast, self-efficacy with regard to facilitating learning and results showed a positive correlation with the working alliance, as did all of the correlates related to the coachee.

Mediation and Moderation Analysis. According to a comparative study of the methods of analysis of mediation effects (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002), the method of multiplying regression coefficients proposed by MacKinnon, Warsi, and Dwyer (1995) gives good statistical power and a low incidence of type one error, so this method was chosen for this study. The hierarchical regression results for the coachees' self-efficacy presented in Table 3 indicate that when coaching and working alliance are both entered together in the regression equation, the working alliance holds a significant coefficient whereas coaching does not. In addition, Sobel's test (1982) confirmed that the association between the number of sessions of executive coaching and development of self-efficacy is mediated by the working alliance ($z = 2.31$, $p < .05$). Further, our results demonstrate that the mediation is complete; the association between executive coaching and self-efficacy becomes nonsignificant when working alliance is added. In regard to moderation, the results from step four of the regression analysis indicate a nonsignificant interactive effect of working alliance and the number of coaching sessions received. These results suggest that working alliance plays a mediating role rather than a moderating role in the relationship between executive coaching and its outcomes.

Working Alliance Determinants Analysis. Table 4 presents the results from the multiple regression analysis we conducted. For this analysis, we retained only the variables that had a significant correlation with working alliance (see Table 2). The results indicate that 53.5% of the variance of the working alliance is explained by the regression equation. Further, findings reveal that the coaches' self-efficacy in facilitating learning and results is a

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression of Coachee's Self-Efficacy, After (Standardized β)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Step 1 β</i>	<i>Step 2 β</i>	<i>Step 3 β</i>	<i>Step 4 β</i>
Coachee SE-Before	.49**	.49**	.44**	.44**
Coaching received		.21*	.08	.07
Working alliance			.39**	.39†
Coaching \times Working alliance				.02
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	.231	.265	.398	.389
Δ <i>adjusted R²</i>		.034*	.133**	-.009

Note: $N = 73$, † $p < .10$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression of the Working Alliance (Standardized β)

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Step 1 β</i>	<i>Step 2 β</i>
Coach's characteristics		
Coach SE-facilitation	.42*	.28*
Coachee's characteristics		
Motivation to transfer		.54**
Supervisor support		.30*
Coaching received		.36**
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	.146*	.535**
Δ <i>adjusted R²</i>		.389**

Note: $N = 31$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

significant correlate of working alliance. Hypothesis 1c was thus confirmed. Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 were also confirmed: motivation to transfer, supervisor support, and the number of coaching sessions are all significant correlates of working alliance.

Discussion

The first objective of this study was to explore what role the working relationship between the coach and the coachee has in executive coaching outcomes. Our results indicate that coach–coachee relationship plays a mediating role in the association between the number of coaching sessions received and development of a manager's self-efficacy. The theoretical implication of this result is important, suggesting that it is by the effect on the coach–coachee relationship that the amount of coaching received influences the development of the coachee. The coach–coachee relationship thus

constitutes a prerequisite for coaching effectiveness. Further, our results also lend solid empirical support to the observations made by Dingman (2004) on the positive correlation between the quality of the coaching relationship and the participants' self-efficacy. They also suggest that the executive coaching process can allow enough time for a real working relationship to be established between the coach and the coachee. Future research should continue to investigate the coaching process. In the same way, Joo (2005) identified several aspects of the process that are worth exploring. Among them, the interpersonal fit between the coach and the coachee is of particular interest. Indeed, very little is known about the personal characteristics that should be taken into account when pairing a coach with a coachee.

The second objective of this study was to investigate the correlates of the coach–coachee relationship. Our findings indicate that with regard to the correlates related to the coach, only the ability to facilitate learning and results—which includes the ability to establish a development plan, track learning progress, use a structured approach, help make connections, and identify obstacles—was significant to explain the variance in the coach–coachee working relationship. Although this result helps to better understand what may influence the working relationship between a coach and a coachee, it contradicts previous findings in the working alliance literature in psychotherapy indicating that the therapist's attributes have a greater influence on the relationship than do the techniques employed (Horvath, 2005). This result may be explained by the fact that the characteristics of the executive coaching clientele and their goals differ from those of the clientele in psychotherapy. Indeed, individuals receiving coaching are generally less fragile and have more resources than do clients in therapy (Peltier, 2001). In addition, the general goal of executive coaching is professional skill development rather than reestablishing a healthy functioning level of interaction with the world, as is often the case in therapy. This result suggests that a manager's development can occur in spite of less introspection than in psychotherapy, so long as the coachee is actively involved in reaching development goals. The coach's skills in facilitation of learning and results seem to encourage putting learning into practice.

From a systemic perspective, it would be interesting to examine the relationship between the characteristics of the organizational culture and the coaching skills associated with working alliance. Our data were collected in an industrial setting very focused on following procedures and obtaining results, and largely composed of managers with a background in engineering. These characteristics may help explain why the more pragmatic coaching skills, related to structuring the process and attaining results, for example, had a larger impact on working alliance than did relational or communication skills.

In regard to the correlates related to the coachee, results indicate that both motivation to transfer and supervisory support were significant

predictors of the coach–coachee relationship. In other words, the more a manager is motivated to apply newly developed skills in her work and the higher is her perception of supervisory support, the better the working alliance with the coach during the coaching process. Motivation to transfer and supervisory support have been included in numerous studies in the training literature. Our results expand our comprehension of these two variables. In regard to supervisory support, it is possible to argue that a manager who does not perceive any support from a superior would be likely to conclude that coaching is not important, and neither is skill development. On the contrary, the support of the supervisor might reinforce the perceived value of the process and encourage the coachee's efforts to develop.

Our findings also reveal that the number of coaching sessions received is a significant determinant of the coach–coachee relationship. This result is consistent with the psychotherapy literature, which shows that the working relationship between the therapist and the client increases with the number of therapy sessions (Kivlighan & Shaughnessy, 1995). The number of sessions also refers to the design of executive coaching. Numerous studies have been conducted on the design of training programs. However, to our knowledge no study has investigated the design of executive coaching. This research represents a first step toward better understanding of that aspect of coaching.

Limitations. There are several limitations associated with the study. First, although the minimum ratio of five subjects per variable (see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006) was met in our regression analysis, a larger sample would have yielded more statistical power. Low statistical power increases the chance of having a type two error, saying that there is no effect when in fact there is one. Thus it is possible that the nonsignificant association found between the coach's self-efficacy for relational skills and for communication skills and the working alliance represents a type two error. Also, a larger sample could have helped to obtain better alpha values for our self-designed instrument in regard to the coaches' self-efficacy. Second, measuring the coach–coachee relationship at the end of the process did not allow us to test for causality. Consequently, an inverse causal effect, where, for instance, an increase in self-efficacy influences the perception of the working relationship, could have occurred (Crits-Christoph, Connolly Gibbons, & Hearon, 2006b). However, some studies conducted in the context of therapy have found that the working alliance predicts outcome when controlling for previous change, which suggests that the "alliance–outcome association is not just an artifact of clients getting better over time" (Castonguay et al., 2006, p. 274). Third, repeated measures of the coach–coachee relationship may have allowed us to better understand the evolution of the working alliance, and, for instance, determine whether a poor evaluation at first was associated with the coachee disinvesting from the process over time.

Last, although scientific literature strongly supports a positive link between self-efficacy and job performance (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1997),

future studies should use, when possible, hard outcome measures. From another perspective, researchers could also expand their mental model about the outcomes of executive coaching by including variables associated with intangible benefits (such as self-awareness or organizational commitment).

Implications for HRD Practice. Management development relies increasingly on executive coaching. Our results allow us to better understand what variables influence the working relationship between a coach and a coachee. In turn, this allows us to better develop interventions aimed at increasing the quality of the working relationship between the coach and the coachee. Our results also underline the importance, when implementing internal executive coaching programs, of working with future coaches on ways to favor the development of a good working relationship. Certification programs should sensitize coaches on the working relationship, by making them conscious of how they influence its development and the obstacles they may encounter. Further, in light of the study by Crits-Christoph and colleagues (2006a), which showed that training can help therapists improve their clients' perception of the working alliance, it would be of interest to evaluate whether certain training programs for coaches would increase the coach's ease with regard to skills in facilitating learning and results, and if the process improve the coachees' perception of the working relationship.

Finally, from another perspective our results highlight the pertinence of preparing the ground for an executive coaching program. Interventions conducted before coaching could help increase the participants' motivation to transfer learning, as well as sensitize supervisors to their key role in confirming the value of the process.

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Appendix 1. Items—measure of coach's self-efficacy in regard to coaching skills

<i>Relational</i> 6 items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do what it takes to make myself completely available. • Demonstrate a sincere interest for the individual I coach and his development plan. • Strive for a good relationship with the person. • Treat the person with respect. • Make an effort to understand what the person experiences. • Show confidence in the person I coach.
<i>Communication</i> 4 items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions that will help the individual to better understand his situation, identify causes, and see possible improvement actions. • Reformulate to verify my comprehension. • Reinforce and constructively criticize the behaviors of the person. • Confront, when necessary, the beliefs and own truths of the person.
<i>Facilitating learning and results</i> 8 items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish coaching agreements that take into account the needs and expectations of all people involved. • Utilize a structured approach during my coaching meetings. • Help the individual to make links between the situation and what he has learned. • With the person, review on a regular basis our approach and make some adjustments if necessary. • Help the individual to identify occasions to put in practice what he has learned as well as concrete actions to achieve his goals. • Help the individual to acknowledge his responsibility toward coaching and the power he has with respect to the situation. • Help the individual to identify difficulties he could encounter during the implementation of his development plan as well as means to address those difficulties. • Give my support to the individual during the implementation of his plan.

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